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Lost in Conversation

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Kate Henley

Quito, Ecuador

October 19, 2017

Lost in Conversation

After talking to my host sister and having experienced the culture here for the last few months, I honestly was either well prepared or simply haven't come across many surprises. Much like my family at home, we eat together as a family for most meals, attend church some Sundays, and do chores on certain days. One thing that I expected but was nonetheless surprised (and occasionally frustrated) by is the amount of time my host family spends with other family members or friends, especially on the weekend. The first weekend here, for example, we went to my host mom's niece's house and spent nearly six hours sitting around the table with coffee just talking. This happens nearly every weekend, and as someone unfamiliar with the language and lifestyle, this was a challenging adjustment.

In general, we have very similar views and values. Having both been raised in a religious environment, we share outlooks in this regard, from praying before meals to ideas of the afterlife. This, however, comes more from family life than from the surrounding culture. Being my age, Valentina and I share similarly "modern" ideas. For example, neither of us want to have kids. Because she lives in a comparatively conservative culture, however, her ideas on things including gender roles, gay marriage, home life, and similar preferences are much more traditional than my own. She also is used to spending hours, sometimes an entire day, sitting at the house and visiting with family friends or neighbors, something I have yet to adjust to.

In terms of Ecuador, this interview, along with these last two months, has helped me shift my thinking from the idea that Ecuador is a "foreign" country. My entire life, especially the months building up to my abroad experience, I considered Ecuador, and South America as a whole, as exotic and different. After being here and interacting with so many people, I've found more similarities than differences between people in the U.S. and those in Ecuador. One important change

in perception relating to the U.S., however, is what a self-focused country we are. As I mentioned earlier, people here will spend hours sitting down and talking to friends or family. The entire time this is happening, I've found it incredibly hard to just listen to their conversation and want nothing more than to go to my room or get up and do something. This lack of interest on my part comes from the U.S.'s idea of needing to be busy and productive, which takes away from spending time and energy on other people.